

Missouri State  
Rehabilitation Council  
For the Blind

Annual Report  
2005



October 1, 2004-

2005

September 30,

## **Message from the Chairman**

December 29, 2005

Dear Friends:

The Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, created by Executive Order 93-01, is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising the RSB (RSB), an agency in the Missouri Division of Family Support (DFS), on its provision of vocational rehabilitation services to Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

As Chair of the State Council, it is my honor to submit the 2005 Annual Report on the status of these services, in accordance with Section 105(5) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Congress in 1998. During the period of this report, the Council has worked cooperatively in many areas of interest with RSB to improve the range, scope and quality of vocational rehabilitation services for the blind and visually impaired. Our quarterly reviews of agency policies, procedures and operations, along with the public forums held in conjunction with our meetings and our "customer satisfaction survey," have given consumers a very important source of input into the rehabilitation process for Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

The State Rehabilitation Council is dedicated to the goal of blind and visually impaired persons to become self-supporting and fully participating members of our society. We hope that you find this report both informative and readable. We would be pleased to answer any questions about this report, the operations of RSB, or the work of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Respectfully Submitted,

Russell E. McCampbell, Ph.D. Chair  
Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

## List of Council Members/Prospective Members

Clay Berry, Kansas City (Not yet appointed) Rehabilitation Program	Russell McCampbell, Chairman Columbia Business, Industry, Labor
Donna Borgmeyer, Jefferson City (Not yet appointed) Consumer	James Pelfrey St. Louis Consumer
Bill Burris, West Plains Consumer Group	Abby Pfefferkorn, Sikeston Consumer
Ceil Callahan, Jefferson City (Not yet appointed) Client Assistance Program	Ruby Polk, Kansas City Consumer
Stanley Grimsley, Adrian Business, Industry, Labor	Mary Kay Savage, Kansas City (Not yet appointed) Parent Training Organization
Debbi Head, Wentzville Business, Industry, Labor	James Sucharski, St. Louis Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education
Beverly Kaskadden, Lake St. Louis Consumer	April Toolooze, Kansas City Consumer
Lawrence Luck, Columbia Co- Chairman Parent of a Blind Child	Brian Wekamp, Jefferson City Consumer Group
	John C. Wunder, Jr., Cleveland Business, Industry, Labor

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## **Section I**

### **Services Provided by RSB**

**Missouri citizens who are blind and visually impaired work with a rehabilitation team to develop an employment goal and achieve success in employment. This team includes a rehabilitation counselor, and might include a rehabilitation teacher and/or mobility specialist. The role of the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB) rehabilitation team is to assist in assessing interest and abilities so a suitable vocational goal can be selected.**

**Vocational rehabilitation services may include:**

- Diagnosis and evaluation**
  - Physical restoration**
  - Vocational training, including college**
  - Continuing education**
  - Tools and equipment**
  - Adaptive technology**
  - Job development**
  - Job placement**
  - Post-employment services**
  - Supported employment**
- 
- Instruction in daily living skills, including Braille and travel training**

- **Community-based rehabilitation services for adjustment to blindness and attainment of alternative skills**

## **Section II**

### **Matters Presented to the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind**

#### **B.E.S.T. Program**

**At the August business meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC), the Department of Health and Senior Services presented information regarding the Blindness Education Screening and Treatment program (Senate Bill 721, Statute 192.935). They requested nominees to serve on a steering committee. The Council appointed two of its members, Lawrence Luck and Clay Berry, to serve.**

**The Blindness Education Screening and Treatment program was established in the Department of Health and Senior Services. This program provides a check-off option for a \$ 1 donation to the program when Missourians obtain new or renewed motor vehicle registrations.**

**The program is intended to provide for:**

- (1) Public education about blindness and other eye conditions;**
- (2) Screenings and eye examinations to identify conditions that may cause blindness; and**
- (3) Treatment procedures necessary to prevent blindness.**

**Mr. Luck and Mr. Berry took part in the September 27th meeting of the B.E.S.T. program steering committee. The**

group developed a list of priorities and directions that will contribute to the performance of this program's specified mission and collaborate with RSB's Prevention of Blindness program.

## **Database Improvements**

RSB has for many years collected information on a database called Knowledge Man. This software was developed in the early 1980's and was DOS-based, requiring specialized knowledge of programming in order to retrieve data from the program and severely limiting its ability to produce reports designed to capture RSB 's performance. RSB has to submit 12 different Federal reports to Rehabilitation Services Administration every year and 90% of the information that goes into those reports comes from the database. The retirement of the last person trained in the operation of Knowledge Man in 2003, coupled with the inherent limitations of the aging software, required that RSB update its database.

RSB hired a contractor to design a new system based on the Access database software package. The process was complicated by the fact that RSB had to continually collect data to send in reports on a timely basis. The contractor and RSB administrative staff began working on the new database system while maintaining parts of the old system. Finally, during the Fourth Quarter, FFY2005, RSB administrative staff and district supervisors got a firsthand look at what the new system is capable of doing. Several reports were circulated, demonstrating that RSB can now sort financial and statistical data by service, by district, or by employee for Vocational Rehabilitation, Older Blind Services and Independent Living Rehabilitation programs. The new database has given RSB the capacity to better understand trends in and the effectiveness of our programs. The level of detail and the time-sensitive nature of the reports will make it possible to make effective management decisions about the Vocational Rehabilitation

**program and service offerings based on factual data rather than on outdated, often imprecise data.**

## **Cooperation with Other Agencies**

**Michael Fester, Deputy Director, was appointed to represent the Department of Social Services on the Governor's Council on Disability.**

**The SRC supported the ad hoc Steering Committee for the Blindness Education Screening and Treatment program by appointing two of its members to serve.**

**There are other facilities throughout the State that work with the blind community. The SRC took the opportunity to inform itself through visits to two of them during their quarterly business meetings. One was the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind - a business that employs blind and sighted individuals to manufacture products that are used by the Government Accounting Office, among others, in a competitive market.**

**The Council also visited Alpha Pointe in Kansas City, which provides services and training for the blind. It also manufactures items for the competitive market.**

**The SRC enhanced its awareness and knowledge of the agencies and their inter-relationships within Missouri.**

## **Additional SRC Activities**

### **Missouri Government Review Commission**

**During the past year, the SRC took the opportunity to express its concerns to the Governor regarding the merger of services with the One-Stop Career Centers and the potential decrease in service to the specialized requirements of the blind community.**



## **Rehabilitation Services Administration Office Closure**

The federal government decided to close the regional offices of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Council expressed its concern regarding this closure because it would deprive the state of support from the regional office in the form of interpretation of regulations and the State's ability to readily obtain data. Individual members on the SRC sent personal letters addressing this issue.

## **Integrated/Competitive Employment Definition**

RSB presented a modified definition for integrated, competitive employment to the SRC. The requirement for specific ratios of disabled to the general population was removed with the understanding that integrated and competitive employment would relate to the job and the payment scale attached to that employment. Individuals who work with the public or a general workgroup were viewed to be in an integrated setting. This definition will be applied on an individual case basis.

## **SRC Member Training**

Region VII Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RCEP) put on training for SRC members under the guidance of Rehabilitation Services Administration. Members who attended during the year included Mike Fester, Russell McCampbell, Ceil Callahan and SRC Executive Director Daniel Nellis.

## **Citizenship Policy**

The policy issue concerning immigrants was reviewed. In order to qualify for services from RSB, a person must be blind or legally blind and eligible to seek employment because of their status as a citizen by birth, naturalization or legally allowed to work in the United States.

## **Student Connections**

RSB held a statewide student conference whose purpose was to clarify the expectations between the agency and students. High school students were strongly encouraged to interact with their college counterparts to obtain information and to network with students at the colleges they might attend.

One of the SRC's members, Beverly Kaskadden, participated in the planning and implementation of this conference in addition to representing the SRC.

## **2005 Rehabilitation Services Administration Monitoring Review**

During the preceding year the Rehabilitation Services Administration held a compliance review. This review evaluated twice as many cases and was more extensive than those conducted in the past. During the exit discussion, all identified issues had either been addressed or had been anticipated.

Missouri was commended for ranking second in the nation for providing its clients with adaptive equipment and fourth in the nation with regard to the hourly wages earned

by this population. It can be assumed that the high hourly wages are a consequence of the provision of this level of rehabilitation technology and training.

The report generated from this review will be available in the future and will be reviewed by the SRC.

## **State Plan Development**

At the SRC's recommendation, the following strategies were included in the State plan:

- Develop a new transition policy and procedure guide for counselors.
- Establish a statewide corporate development strategy for accessing state and nation-wide employers
- Change counselor's primary focus from service delivery to assessment and vocational goal selection.
- Develop relationships with groups such as AARP and Green Thumb to improve collaboration with statewide entities that serve similar interests.

The SRC gave its final approval to the FFY2006 State Plan on March 30, 2005.

Item # 1 is currently being addressed within the various components of services to the blind and visually impaired. Committees within the Missouri School for the Blind, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and RSB have been cooperating in the development of seamless transition procedures.

Items #2 & 3 have seen progress in achievement of these goals. A number of companies have been contacted to expand placement of blind consumers and counselors have been trained to identify vocational objectives.

## **Consumer Handbook**

The concept of a consumer handbook for VR clients began with RSB four (4) years ago. Since that time, the handbook was developed and drafts circulated for approval by the RSB. During the fiscal year 2005, the proposed Consumer Handbook /Vocational Rehabilitation was completed, published, and distributed to the local offices. It is being provided to all new cases. The handbook is in standard print, large print and Braille, available at each local office and, upon request, in alternative formats such as cassette tape or compact disk.

## **Public Forums**

Shortly after the SRC was formed, public forums began as a means for gathering input from consumers about their concerns with various aspects of services and a venue for those who wish to say "Thank You" for the services they received. The SRC has learned that some consumers feel more comfortable making these comments to persons "outside the agency," rather than to their counselors or teachers.

When the SRC meetings were held in Jefferson City, the Council's exposure to consumer feedback was limited because of travel issues experienced by only those clients who were able to attend.

During FFY2005, public forums were held in Rolla (November, 2004), Springfield (February, 2005), St. Louis (May, 2005) and Kansas City (August, 2005). The additional venues facilitated consumer access to these forums. The SRC received valuable input from citizens that was readily acted upon by RSB staff. The public's participation indicated interest in having this venue accessible to them.

Throughout FFY2005, every forum began with unsolicited statements of appreciation by clients for the positive impact of the services that they received from RSB.

***November 4, 2004 – Rolla, MO***

**The meeting was held at Rolla and provided an opportunity for citizens to participate.**

***February 3, 2005 – Springfield, MO***

**The public took this opportunity to express their pleasure with the SRC's re-instituting the practice of visiting various communities throughout Missouri.**

**One consumer expressed her gratitude to RSB for the services and assistive technology that helped her retain her job as an assistant principal.**

**Citizen feedback suggested the need for information about the array and depth of services available through RSB.**

**NOTE: In August, the consumer handbook was approved, published, and distributed to all offices and provided an additional resource for clients.**

**Clarification regarding reimbursement from the State to providers and consumers/clients was requested. Some students were required to pay for their books and for their readers. The average reimbursement period had been 90 days. This presented a cash problem for both consumers and providers.**

**NOTE: By May, the number of personnel processing vouchers increased and eliminated the backlog in paying providers and consumers. Reimbursements now occur within a 30-45 day period.**

**NOTE: RSB's policies regarding reimbursement for readers (both for Vocational Rehabilitation cases as well as the statutory Readers for the Blind Program) are currently under review.**

**There was a suggestion that creative methods be explored to get information to the parents of blind children about services.**

**Another question was raised regarding the availability of counseling services for the family members of a newly blinded individual.**

**NOTE: This presented the opportunity for the SRC to inform consumers/clients that adjustment counseling to family members was available through RSB.**

***May 12, 2005 - St. Louis***

**The St. Louis constituency demonstrated interest in a variety of topics. Some were concerned about the national drift away from providing services for the disabled population and what actions could reverse this process.**

**Some clients wanted information on the procedures used by the State to award contracts to providers and asked if the process could be opened for others to bid on as well.**

**NOTE: They were immediately informed that anyone who wished to become a provider could register with the State and should maintain contact with the various offices that they would be serving. Each office maintains a list of providers.**

**Nationally, the unemployment rate for the blind is a 75% and there is little guidance about which occupations the blind are employed. Because the blind do not have enough information about the options available to them, the occupational choice process is constrained.**

**NOTE: During the August business meeting of the SRC, RSB reported that it developed and implemented a training program for counselors that will help them**

**better identify various occupational options in which a client may be able to achieve success.**

***August 11, 2005 – Kansas City***

**During the Public Forum, consumers expressed their appreciation for the services they received through RSB. Some consumers mentioned significant delays between the time equipment was needed and was actually provided. Delays slow the rehabilitation process and might cause individuals to get poorer grades or miss entire semesters of college training.**

**Transitioning of students into a college setting was examined. The equipment on which students are trained usually belongs to a school district; beginning activities in a new setting while having to wait for new equipment impairs the student's ability to adjust and succeed. Braille taught to individuals at an early age prevents disruptions that may occur later in life when needs for alternative methods of coding information begin to develop.**

**The coordination of services between RSB and the Career Centers was a topic of discussion.**

## **Consumer Survey**

**During FFY2005, a customer satisfaction survey was conducted and covered all 500 closures which occurred during FFY2004.**

**In August and September of 2005, RSB mailed out the client satisfaction survey. 500 questionnaires were sent out in print form and respondents were provided with the option for a Braille questionnaire or the survey could be answered over the telephone. The response to this survey was 19%. For a mail survey, this is a significant level of response. There were 242 questionnaires mailed to successfully**

closed cases and 258 questionnaires mailed to clients who did not complete the program. The largest response came from the clients who successfully completed the program. They represented 66% of all respondents.

A review of these scores demonstrates a satisfied group of clients. The mean score of all respondents was 3.5 out of a possible 5 on the Likert scale. There is a noticeable shift in the statistics (and responses) in the three areas that address being adequately trained for employment, seeking employment and post-employment support. Coming from the group of successfully rehabilitated clients, this may indicate a shortcoming in the services provided to consumers. The training program referred to in the August Public Forum may have begun to address the situation. The Council recognized that subsequent questionnaires must and will better define the issues that surround these results.

The group of respondents that did not complete their program appears to be more satisfied than those who did.

The mean score of all respondents who did not complete their program was 3.7 out of a possible 5 on the Likert scale. It should be noted that for question # 2, which dealt with whether or not the client felt that they had control over the rehabilitation plan, the mean response was four. The limited ability of the clients to exert control over their rehabilitation plan may be a result of limited information about alternatives and choices.

The Department of Political Science and Public Policy Administration at University of Missouri at St. Louis (UMSL) was consulted regarding this questionnaire. It was submitted to graduate students for their review and received positive comments. They also recommended clarifying some questions and reworking some others so that they could be more appropriately measured on the Likert scale. The SRC will continue to use this resource for



future improvements in the survey. Full results of the survey will be posted on the SRC's webpage at:  
<http://www.dss.mo.gov/fsd/rsb/srcmeeting/index.htm>

## **Section III**

### **Statistical Analysis of RSB Operations**

RSB is the designated state unit described in the Vocational Rehabilitation Act as Amended in 1998 for persons with visual disabilities in the State of Missouri. RSB is a section of and reports to the Family Support Division, part of the Department of Social Services. RSB had a total of 114 full time equivalent staff positions (FTEs) in FFY2005; there were 117 in FFY2004. The following numbers of staff are included in the FTE count:

- 18 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs)**
- 18 Rehabilitation Teachers (RTs)**
- 6 Orientation and Mobility Specialists**
- 1 Job Development Specialist**
- 7 District Supervisors**

- 7 Clerical Supervisors (1 position is vacant)**
- 5 Children's' Specialists (1 position vacant)**
- 5 Business Enterprise Area Supervisors (1 position vacant)**

**There are 22 administrative and management staff in various positions at the central office in Jefferson City.**

**Approximately 11 FTEs are used to provide reader and driver accommodation to staff with disabilities.**

**All of the positions named above are directly involved in providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.**

## **Open Cases**

**There were 1001 open cases in FFY2005. 533 persons opened new Vocational Rehabilitation cases with RSB at some time during FFY 2005.**

## **Applications**

**In order to receive vocational rehabilitation services, each consumer must complete an application and undergo eligibility consideration. When an application has been signed, a consumer is considered as being in "02" status. The group that consists of all consumers who apply during a given year is considered to be a good measuring stick against which to compare other case actions, such as successful closures, in order to determine if there are anomalies which affect certain population groups such as women and ethnic minorities.**

**During FFY2005, a total of 533 persons applied for vocational rehabilitation services; there were 547 in FFY2004. From application status, cases are moved to either "06 Status" (extended evaluation), "08 Status" (closed before eligibility is established) or "Status 10" (Individualized Plan for Employment)(IPE). 262 (49%) of the applicants were male, while 271 (51%) females applied for services. The youngest applicant was 15 years old and the oldest applicant was 87 years of age. The average age of applicants is currently 38; in FFY2004, it was 47.**

## **Closure Types**

**RSB categorizes closed cases based on whether or not services have led to employment. In considering whether or not a case has been successful, the type of employment is considered. Employment of consumers in competitive work (work in an integrated environment which pays at least minimum-wage), self-employment or the Business**

Enterprise Program is considered as "targeted employment," or the employment that Rehabilitation Services Administration considers as appropriate for determining an agency's success or failure. Additionally, there is one other category, which is considered (during this Fiscal Year), as successful closures, but not as targeted closures - employment as a homemaker. Each of these is considered successful employment closure; however, the most weight is accorded to closures of the targeted group. All closures which result in employment are referred to as "Status 26" closures.

## **Employment Closures**

### **Status 26 -Successful Closures**

RSB successfully closed 242 cases with consumers who achieved their employment goals during FFY 2005. Included in this total are 190 (187 in FFY2004) competitive employment closures, 11 (24 in FFY2004) homemakers, 31 (25 in FFY2004) who achieved self-employment, 9 (13 in FFY2004) who found employment through the Business Enterprise Program and 1 (1 in FFY2004) who began work through the Supported Employment Program. Total employment success has improved when compared to FFY 2004.

Of the 242 closures, 93 (38.2%) moved from unemployment at the time of application to employment at the time of closure; this is the same as FFY2004 (92 or 38%). In all, approximately 77 (or 70%) of RSB's closures either resulted in employment for the consumer or more lucrative employment for the consumer, which is a 10% increase over FFY2004. The remaining 23% of closures were cases where vocational rehabilitation services made it possible for the consumer to retain the jobs they had at the time of application. The average age of consumers who achieved employment as a result of RSB services was 47; the youngest was 19, and the oldest was 83 years old.

## **Cost of Employment Closures**

In achieving the successful employment closures described above, RSB expended \$2,840,320 during FFY2005 (\$2,186,237 in FFY2004). This equates to an average cost of \$11,737 per case (\$9071 in FFY2004). The highest cost for successful employment case was \$106,328 (\$113,786 in FFY2004); the lowest case cost \$0 (the same as in FFY2004).

## **Income from Employment Closures**

The 242 paid employment closures achieved by RSB consumers during FFY 2005 resulted in weekly earnings of approximately \$95,877 (or an average of \$396.19 per week). On an annual basis this group would earn \$4,985,604. If a tax rate of 20% existed, this group of consumers would repay the cost of their rehabilitation (\$2,840,320) in 3.5 years.

This example of rehabilitation paying for itself does not consider the substantially greater cost savings that result from the decrease in the cost of benefits such as Social Security, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, etc. It is projected that approximately 76 consumers will meet Substantial Gainful Activity status as a result of their new earnings; in 2004, the number was 30.

During FFY2005, approximately 42% of all successful closures began with no income. The average income per week prior to applying for vocational rehabilitation services was \$232; at the completion of services, the average income was \$396 and represents an average increase of \$164 per week (44%) in income.

## **Homemakers**

10 consumers achieved employment as homemakers in FFY2005; there were 24 in FFY2004. A downward shift in

this population age occurred. Homemakers averaged 47 years of age (53 in FFY2004); the youngest consumer was 21 years old (27 in FFY2004) and the oldest was 74 (87 in FFY2004).

RSB expended \$14,302 on 10 homemaker closures during FFY 2005. In FFY2004, \$76,062 was spent for 24 closures. There was a significant decrease in the number of persons being trained as homemakers as well as cost per case. The cost was reduced by 55%.

## **Status 32 - Post Employment**

Once the consumer has been employed for a minimum of 90 days, and all services required by the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) have been delivered, the case can be closed in Status 26. However, many cases require services of an ongoing nature to retain employment or adjust to new employment. For those cases, RSB can re-open the case for "Post-Employment Services." Under Post-Employment Services, RSB can provide for service needs which are discovered after employment has begun, or that arise as employment continues. These services are limited to those, which can be provided under the existing IPE. If the employment cannot be maintained and a new IPE is necessary, the case must be closed and a new case (Status 02) opened.

54 cases were opened in Status 32 (Post-Employment Services) at some time during FFY2005. Of the 54 post-employment cases opened, 50 were subsequently closed as having successfully retained employment and 4 were closed to be re-opened as new cases where the employment could not be maintained or the situation called for a revision of the Individualized Plan for Employment.

## **Non-employment Closures**

## **Status 08 Closures**

Status 08 closures occur when consumers apply for services but their cases are closed prior to determining eligibility. During FFY2005, 74 cases were closed in this status. There were 116 such cases in FFY2004, which represents a 64% improvement in the process of screening for eligibility.

## **Status 28 Closures**

Status 28 closures are those cases which are closed after the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) services have been delivered, but in which employment was not achieved. These cases are of particular interest to the SRC because they often occur after the expenditure of significant resources. In FFY2005, RSB recorded 66 closures in Status 28, compared to 123 in FFY2004. In all, RSB spent \$552,945 on cases closed in Status 28 during FFY2005, down from \$1,802,379 in FFY2004. Cost per case has improved also, averaging \$4455 during FFY2005 vs. \$14,653 in FFY2004.

## **Administrative Reviews/Mediations/Hearings Conducted**

There was only one request for a hearing during FFY 2005 and it was withdrawn. No mediations were requested.

## **Continued Vision for the Future**

RSB's mission is the creation of opportunities for, and the personal and vocational success of, blind and visually impaired consumers. The SRC continues to work cooperatively with RSB to improve the services offered to meet what we consider to be the unique rehabilitation

**needs of consumers with visual disabilities. We believe in the abilities of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Finally, the SRC believes that, with the proper training, alternative skills and assistive technology that are provided through a specialized program for persons with visual disabilities, individuals who are blind can be vocationally, socially and economically competitive.**